

PIVOT PHOENIX 27.5



WHEN I LOOK AT THE BIKE ON PAPER, IT'S JUST A MYSTERY. I MEAN IT SHOULDN'T MAKE SENSE BUT IT DOES." PIVOT CYCLES CHRIS COCALIS REFLECTED ON THE 2015 PHOENIX 27.5 DOWNHILL BIKE. SURE IT MAY HAVE A 62 DEGREE HEAD ANGLE AND TRACE ITS LINEAGE TO WORLD CUP TRACKS, BUT THE 2015 PIVOT PHOENIX IS AS MUCH A CITIZEN'S BIKE AS IT IS A SLAYER OF TRACKS FROM SCANDINAVIA TO BRITISH COLUMBIA. BERNARD KERR RODE THE NEW BIKE TO A NINTH PLACE FINISH IN HAFJELL LAST SEASON AND ONLY MISSED A STELLAR RESULT IN LEONGANG BY A MISGUIDED FLIGHT PATH OVER THE TAPE. COCALIS DISCUSSED THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE BIKE AND THE TIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH KERR THAT LED TO THE 27.5-INCH REINCARNATION OF THE MYTHICAL DH BIKE.

WHEN DID YOU START THE DESIGN OF THE BIKE?
Probably about two years ago.

WHERE DID THE DEVELOPMENT OF THIS BIKE START, AND HOW DID IT TIE INTO THE WORLD CUP PROGRAM?

I had been testing the first couple of prototypes in Phoenix [Arizona] and going to Winter Park [Colorado] and stuff, but as far as getting Bernard on the first bike it was at Crankworx last summer. They had the Canadian Open downhill race and all the World Cup guys were there. He only did one practice run and finished eighth overall, which is by far his best result with that group of talent. Then the next weekend, he took it to the World Cup (Hafjell) and qualified third. Then he finished ninth and got his first top-ten ever. That was the start of the development. We've been through several little changes like some minor suspension stuff – cable routing, the bottom out bumper – the

little details of the bike. We pretty much had that worked out by the time I gave him the bike.

WHAT LED YOU DOWN THE PATH OF 27.5? DID YOU SEE TWO YEARS AGO THAT WAS THE PATH WORLD CUP BIKES WERE HEADED DOWN?

I didn't see that, necessarily on World Cup bikes. It was over four years ago that I rode somebody's hybrid conversion bike that had been converted to 27.5, and it had a shock reducer to limit the travel so it could fit the bigger wheels. It had too high a bottom bracket and handled horribly but I liked the way it rolled over stuff. I was actually riding back in Pennsylvania where there are so many roots and rocks that unless you're on a real long travel 26-inch bike you can't keep up. I would never go back and ride without a 29er because the one time I did I absolutely got shelled. With the hybrid I could actually keep

up with them and get around the tight corners and stuff a lot better. I started talking to Fox and Rock Shox about forks at the time since we had embarked on a shorter travel, Mach 5ish type project. We couldn't get Fox or Rock Shox to build us a fork. It wasn't time for it. Basically both of them told me to go pound sand.

SO EVEN FOUR YEARS AGO...
They just flat out refused.

WHAT DO YOU THINK CHANGED THEIR MINDS?

I think Cube in Germany changed their minds, because they are huge and wanted to do 650b. It was interesting because both the suspension guy at Rock Shox and the vice president at Fox called me within three days of each other and asked me if I was still interested in doing this.

I said 'yea absolutely. What's going on? Is Specialized doing this?'

THE LEGEND REBORN

Interview Andrew Julliano



Bernard Kerr scrubbing harder than a janitor in a chile cookoff bathroom. Queenstown, NZ. Photo: Jens Staudt

They said 'No, No, but it's someone big who really wants to push this and you pushed it first.' We were able to get on board and get started early. There really needed it to be someone like a Scott or a Cube or a Trek sized company to do the volume.

WHEN YOU GOT THE CALL FROM ROCK SHOX AND FOX IS THAT WHEN YOU REALLY STARTED GETTING INTO THE PROJECT?

They didn't just want to know that I was interested – they wanted to know what travel and where I was looking. That's where the Mach 6 evolved. We worked on some projects with 29ers in the 150mm category. And 29ers do some things well but they do most things not well, and you can feel the wheel weight and the wheel flex and the tire weight. When you get the geometry right, they can just bomb down shit fast, but there's just so

much more that you have to put up with and that's where I thought the 27.5 was pretty premium.

When we started thinking about making a new carbon downhill bike, we thought we should design it to be able to take 27.5-inch wheels. I was with a bunch of bike companies at a dinner in Taiwan. It was most of the Canadian brands and we were talking about it pretty openly at dinner. Everyone was like, 'yeah it could be cool but will the wheels fit, will the chainstays be too long, how much will we have to reduce the travel?' Those became the real challenges.

Early prototypes had bolt on dropouts and the original concept was that we were going to design it set up for 27.5 wheels with proper BB height and we had a zero stack headset cup in there, but also be able to run as a 26-inch.

The [27.5] bike runs the same basic leverage curves and spring

rates [as the 26], so I could take the shock off the 26-inch wheel Phoenix and basically be in the ballpark on the new bike. I had the two bikes (a 26- and 27.5-inch version) and the first run at Winter Park, the speed I could carry and the way I could rail through the turns, I was like, 'I'm never going to ride a 26-inch wheeled bike again.'

This bike started with [Dave] Weagle and some of his ideas from working [on other DH] bikes – not how the suspension is set up, but where the World Cup geometry is going, how long and low everything is going. So we're looking at these numbers and Dave originally suggested he'd build a bike that way, but he thought it was ridiculous.

You go out and ride the bike and I thought it would push like the World Cup setup of the previous bike since this had gone even lower and even slacker and even

longer on the front center. It's just the difference of the 27.5 wheels, the contact patch and the way the wheels hook up. You don't just have to be that super hard charger where you're over the front of the bike the whole time. If you're a little bit over the back, the front end still isn't going to push, it still rails. It inspires you to get more forward and ride the bike more aggressively because it doesn't let you down. So I was 80 percent there by the time Bernard got it.

HOW MUCH OF THIS BIKE IS DEVELOPED ON THE WORLD CUP CIRCUIT? OR IS IT JUST FINE TUNED THERE?

It's fine tuned there. We started with our ideas and Weagle designing the first bike. His Iron Horse Sunday World Cup geometry and knowledge went into the Phoenix. Then we had three years of World Cup teams with different riders – two seasons with Kyle [Strait], a season with Mitch Delfs and other top-level riders. If this [new bike] is the lightest, we were on the other end of the spectrum with the aluminum. Kyle Strait went an entire season on that bike and then got third at Rampage. Under a guy that size, honestly a bike like that shouldn't last all season. It's not normal for a World Cup rider to have just one frame.

On carbon, we expect that the frame is made to last. Carbon has much higher fatigue, and if you design within the fatigue life correctly, those guys should be able to beat the crap out of these things day in and day out. Unless they cartwheel over the side of boulders, it should be able to take normal riding and quite a few big crashes as well. Our experience grows and we get all the knowledge from doing this over the years. Then we get it to Bernard.

He is a good tester in that he is harder on equipment than anybody I've ever known, which is not always a good thing. He likes to go out with photographers and videos and he always goes bigger. It doesn't matter where the landing is or if there is a landing. He'll go bigger. He's testing and developing the Reynolds Carbon DH rims now and they will be better rims because of it. The other riders won't be busting stuff up but he'll be doing all the damage.

In that respect, when you're out with him, he's relatively smooth, but he's going so big and pounding stuff so hard that shit just breaks. He's definitely matured as a rider but he'll find things that would take other riders who are hard riders two or three years to find. He finds them in two weeks, so that's good.